Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies

Volume 20, Issue 1 2020 Article No. 2

SPEAKING OF VIOLENCE

"Embodying Histories of Violence: Representations of Scarred Bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil Women in Sri Lankan Tamil Diasporic Women's Writing in English"

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Embodying Histories of Violence: Representations of Scarred Bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil Women in Sri Lankan Tamil Diasporic Women's Writing in English

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Abstract

The paper seeks to explore embodied histories of violence through an insightful discussion on the representations of scarred bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic women's writing in English. The study employs a qualitative approach and conducts a content analysis of selected narratives in the primary texts: Shankari Chandran's *Song of the Sun God* (2017), V.V. Ganeshananthan's *Love Marriage* (2008), and Mary Anne Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* (2005). The narratives selected for the study are approached as a body of literary work that portrays scarred bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women both within and outside Sri Lanka against the backdrop of ethnic and communal violence. It posits that in a context of war, bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women, as represented in the novels, are perceived as battle sites on which warring factions inscribe their authority. The study then examines the legacy of violence as a shared communal trait among Sri Lankan Tamils and argues for the alternative presented through the narratives of approaching the scarred bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women as spaces of empowerment, as opposed to impure or sullied bodies that are incapable of representing their Sri Lankan Tamil families and communities.

KEYWORDS: embodying, histories of violence, scarred bodies, Sri Lankan Tamil women

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> They all had scars, she thought, pulling reflexively at her sari pallu: some were more recent than others, some were more healed than others, but none were more important than others. (Chandran, 2017, p. 241)

The scars, from battle wounds in a war these individuals did not wage, leave an indelible mark on the members of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. In the above extract from Chandran's *Song of the Sun God* (2017), Nala recalls that Thiru's family was from a lower caste, whereas she represented the highest caste, the Vellala caste. However, to Nala, these hierarchical structures, integral to Tamil identity, are immaterial in a context where "everyone looked degraded by the conflict, no matter which caste or class they had been born into" (241). Nala notices the burns on the arms of Senthan, Thiru's son, and recalls that Thiru lost his daughter-in-law and grandchildren on the 23rd of July in 1983, a day known for the massacre of members of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Nala's own body bears the scars of the brutal treatment to which she was subjected during the 1983 riots, where she was set on fire upon the discovery of her Tamil identity. While her husband, Ranjan, a doctor by profession, devotes his time to ensuring the healing of her physical scars, neither he nor Nala can escape the emotional sores in the aftermath of the riots, despite their migration to Australia.

The research examines the debilitating effects of violence in the form of scars that are borne by Sri Lankan Tamil women in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic women's writing. The

emphasis in this study is also on the aftermath of violence, as the physical and emotional scars inscribed on the bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women are not merely reflective of the individual trauma they undergo, but are indicative of the histories of violence inflicted on Sri Lankan Tamili communities. The war between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),[ii] is known as one of the longest running civil wars in Asia, and lasted nearly three decades. The cause for the war in Sri Lanka is often associated with July 23rd, 1983, also known as Black July, when the LTTE reportedly ambushed an army convoy and killed thirteen soldiers, which triggered riots in which approximately 2,500 Tamils died. After an attempted ceasefire agreement in 2002, the war resumed in 2005. Eventually, the defeat of the LTTE and the capture and killing of its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, in 2009, signaled the official end of the war. Uyangoda commences his 2017 keynote address titled "Sri Lanka: Continuing Dilemmas of Peace Building and Reconciliation", by highlighting that the period following 2009 is the post-war era as Sri Lanka is yet to become a post-conflict society. Based on the extensive ethnographic research that she conducts among Tamil and Muslim communities living in northern Sri Lanka, Thiranagama argues that the "military war may have ended [but] not the political one" to suggest that the concerns of minorities in Sri Lanka remain unaddressed (4). Therefore, the present study refers to the military battle from 1983-2009 as the war and the period following the official end of the war as the post-war period.

The tragedy that marks Chandran's *Song of the Sun God* (2017) is echoed in Ganeshananthan's *Love Marriage* (2008), which is woven primarily around a second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic woman, Yalini, whose birth in the US coincides with the catastrophe of the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka: "I was born in the early hours of the morning, on a day late in July. And as I entered this new world, my parents' old world was being destroyed" (Ganeshananthan 15). Yalini's birth signals the annihilation of the existing "old world" that her parents knew and loved, and her name symbolizes their immense loss, a flailing attempt to cleave to what they no longer possessed: "my parents named me Yalini, after the part of their home that they loved the most. It is a Tamil name, with a Tamil home: a name that means, in part, Jaffna, Sri Lanka, the place from which they came" (ibid., 19). When Yalini's father, Murali, visits Sri Lanka with his wife and two-year-old daughter, he experiences a sense of "belonging again", a feeling of which he is deprived, living in the US, distanced from his home in Jaffna (233). As Jayasuriya points out, Yalini's name is symbolically meant to preserve life and signify a mythical "home" that is not merely a space of origin but a "reminder of what her parents left behind and yet cling to" (156).

The grating reality of the statement "leaving: this is how it is done" encapsulates the narrative of displacement for many of those who hailed from Jaffna (Ganeshananthan 127). This sentiment captured in *Love Marriage* reflects the essence of multiple narratives, including Shyam Selvadurai's celebrated novel *Funny Boy,* that dwell on the escalating ethnic tensions and the violence inflicted on members of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. In *Love Marriage*, Yalini's mother, Vani, recollects the gradual dispersion of those living in Jaffna: "this was what her family did: leave Sri Lanka, one by one, piece by piece. Although they left it until it was nearly too late, it was not something hard to do, finally—leaving" (125).

The depiction of violence in literature is not unfamiliar terrain for Sri Lankan writers or readers. The history of Sri Lanka is steeped in countless atrocities that continue to plague the country, as evinced in the recent bombings on Easter Sunday in 2019. Consequently, the normalizing of violence as an everyday occurrence, its potential to destabilize structures on

which co-existence is formed, and its capacity to annihilate communities and incite communal tensions, positions violence as an intrinsic aspect of Sri Lankan identity and a critical dimension of the representation of Sri Lankan identities in literature written in English. While Sri Lankan literary work may tend to reflect on the universality of violence, it also hints at the raw, unhealed scars of Sri Lankan history—scars caused by approximately three decades of war and embedded in the identity of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. While Jayasuriya maps the literary representations of different forms and sources of violence that are etched into Sri Lankan history,[iii] including the insurrections of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Thiranagama observes that a specific status is accorded to "yuttham" or war, which "had fundamentally transformed their social and physical landscapes", and therefore was vastly different from the prevailing ethnic discrimination of the 1950s, 60s, or 70s, or even the insurrections of 1971 and 1987 that occurred in the South which also resulted in mass arrests and disappearances (9). In a similar vein, Walker locates her seminal ethnographic study in Eastern Sri Lanka and presents a nuanced portrayal of the everyday negotiations of violence in war-torn communities. Set during 2005-2007, the period leading to the official end of the war in 2009, the essence of Walker's 2013 study is derived from the capacity of individuals to "endure violence" on an everyday basis: "pushing at the small cracks and spaces in the continuum of violence, they created a sense of the everyday that was about violence yet also challenged the meaning of the everyday and of the ordinary, opening up meaning to encompass other possibilities and imaginations" (2-3). In an interview with Meena, a participant of her study, Walker further explores the coping mechanisms that women employ in their daily activities to "stitch together a fabric of endurance that composes everyday life" (99).

In discourses on women and their position in war-torn contexts, their bodies are strategically located in the periphery, yet central to both nationalist and diasporic discourses that tend to rationalize the physical and emotional violence inflicted on women's bodies. Gedalof draws attention to the exploitative use of a woman's body as a national or ethnic marker in ethnic politics and communal belonging, which makes it susceptible to communal violence given its role in reproductive activities (2003). Subsequently, the "place" that is attributed to women whose bodies are produced as "place" or "home", as a sanctified space that is safeguarded from external contamination, contributes to the forcible displacement of women during ethnic tensions as a mechanism to reformulate boundaries (94). Therefore, the attempts to reproduce the "home" of the past are underscored by the demand on women to embody the "authentic" values of the family, community, and nation, structures that are underpinned by notions of purity (Gedalof; Wickramasinghe[iv]).

Mookerjea-Leonard examines the intervention of literature[v] in the face of the refusal of Hindu and Sikh families and communities to reintegrate women who were either abducted or captured and violated, during the riots related to the Partition of British India and later repatriated from Pakistan. Central to Mookerjea-Leonard's analysis is how securing a position within the home is contingent on underlying notions of chastity, a non-negotiable prerequisite to representing the assumed purity of family, community, and nation (4).

Focusing specifically on Sri Lankan Tamil communities, Fuglerud discusses how the dismantling of age and gender hierarchical practices, including the dowry system, and the eradication of sexual discrimination, within the LTTE, could potentially stir change in the texture of the Sri Lankan Tamil community (202). However, a clear disparity between the ethos of the LTTE and the ideologies that the movement prescribed to the women in the community has been

identified in related scholarship. Instead, restrictive cultural norms for women in terms of tradition, from dress code to conduct, are strictly endorsed both in Sri Lanka and among the diaspora (Gerharz; Maunaguru; Thiranagama). Gerharz adds that the local culture of the Tamil community "is based on the assumption of purity, which is predominantly defined in terms of female purity and chastity" and maintains that Tamil diasporic communities that refuse to adhere to practices that regulate sexuality are considered irreverent and disrespectful of the shared values of the community (126).

Needless to say, the bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women are implicitly associated with notions of purity and produced at the intersection of seeming contradictions: on the one hand, women are vulnerable to perpetrators who utilize their bodies as weapons in war and, on the other hand, they are susceptible to the threat of being rejected as impure or sullied by their own networks of family and community. As Bradley and Kirmani point out, dogmas that inadvertently endorse violence against women are part of a broader discourse in which competing ideologies from different standpoints, "secular, religious, and conservative are often played out on women's bodies and by governing sexual relationships in general" (218).[vi] The layered complexities of the histories of violence embodied by Sri Lankan Tamil women, represented through the emotional and physical scars they bear, are unraveled in the literary work of Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic women writers in the interwoven nature of their portrayals of Sri Lankan Tamil women both within and outside Sri Lanka.

Inheriting scars: Embodying histories of violence

In Chandran's representation of bodies that are subject to the mutilating effects of war, Dhara's body figures prominently as one that is sexually violated in the hands of members of the armed forces. Despite the warnings of Nala and Ranjan, Dhara remains in Jaffna to aid a medical project conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, during this process, she is taken into custody under suspicion, repeatedly raped, and her disfigured body is dumped on the side of the road (Chandran 141-144). As water "trickled around the scar tissue, finding pathways through roughened terrain", Dhara laments that her body is "hideous" and "decayed", despite the reassurances of Priya, Nala's daughter, that it is merely "damage" which then has the capacity to heal (156). Unknown to Priya, the term "damage" accurately describes the perception of the body of a victim of rape as it is associated with the loss of a woman's purity. Maunaguru explicates the ways in which the bodies of violated or raped women, specifically Tamil women in Jaffna, are conceived within the political terrains of the conflict zone. According to Maunaguru, "women's sexuality becomes an object" that is not merely a personal violation, but a communal weapon, as "women's bodies become a staging site on which the re-performance of the drama of one group's dominance over the other group takes place" (168).[vii] The multi-pronged political play of the violence inflicted on Dhara reduces her body to a mere "rhetorical sign", as "in the war zone, women's bodies are simultaneously saturated with and stripped of meaning", rendering them "invisible" (Samuelson 833).[viii] *Song of the Sun God* also cites an incident that occurred in 1996 in Jaffna of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy, whose mangled body was found with those of her brother, mother, and a family friend who had gone to the army base in search of the young girl when she went missing (Chandran 369). As such, the representation of Dhara's defiled body in *Song of the Sun God* is

reflective of the broader discourse and practice within which bodies of Tamil women are manipulated symbolically and subjected to politically sanctioned violence in war-torn Sri Lanka.

The extent of the brute force Dhara experiences is displayed when she studies her distorted image in the mirror and finds similarities between her reflection and a mere animal butchered in preparation for a meal. She recollects how she witnessed the preparation of an animal for consumption in Ayah's kitchen and scrutinizes the "naked animal" she sees in the mirror, which was "embroidered with a familiar labyrinth of tiny violet veins, leading inwards, seeking her hidden heart" (151). When her sister-in-law, Shiranthi, applies lipstick to Dhara in preparation for their weekly outings, despite the gradual healing of her body, "Dhara stared at her reflection and pressed English Rose lips together. A deceptively normal woman stared and tried to smile back, tearfully" (170).

Love Marriage differs in its treatment of violence from *Song of a Sun God*, as it captures the struggles that Sri Lankan Tamil women in Jaffna encounter on a daily basis when they are forced to contend with the misogynistic practices that are intrinsic to their families and communities. As Ranasinha highlights, the "most powerful feminist intervention" of *Love Marriage* "lies in its moving portraits of the little-known lives of previous generations of Tamil women imbricated in different forms of patriarchy" (120). Similar to Dhara's knowledge of her scarred body in *Song of the Sun God*, Yalini in *Love Marriag*e is acutely aware of her own body: "I am familiar with the planes and angles of my own geography. I know each scar and regularity" (Ganeshananthan 263). However, Yalini's response to her body is influenced by her growing awareness of the emotionally and physically scarred women in her family and community in Sri Lanka (including that of Kunju, Harini and Mayuri),[ix] whose untold histories have disappeared over the course of time. Yalini's bewilderment at her own gradual disappearance stems from a keen awareness that she was "born lucky" and thereby far removed from the histories of women in her family and community, as she "had everything that Kunju, Tharshi, Mayuri, Harini and Uma did not" (266).

Ahmed utilizes the Lacanian model of embodiment to account for the ways in which the effect of the surface is constituted and how bodies are "not given or pre-determined", but produced in relation to other bodies through a "temporal and spatial process of misrecognition and projection" (42). Ahmed adds that Frantz Fanon's approach to this psychoanalytic model suggests that the encounter through which the subject assumes a bodily image is not merely one of projection and misrecognition, but a racial encounter. Ahmed conjectures that while Lacan's dialectic of self-othering is abstract, wherein the other could be anything that is beyond the bodily image presented through the mirror, according to Fanon's reading of the Lacanian model, the embodied subject and that which is excluded from that imagined body image, are already framed by specific histories.

In *Love Marriag*e, when Yalini gazes at the mirror, the assumed bodily image and that which is not visible in that image is framed in the histories of her parents' community. As Ahmed elucidates, the imaginary relation between these different entities is embedded in histories, inflected by "social antagonism and conflict which differentiate bodies from each other" (44).

While Fanon's theorization engages specifically with racial discrimination based on color, the bodily image that Yalini assumes is framed by those vastly different from her and yet intimately connected to her through networks of family and community: histories of women who

preceded her, whose lives are unaccounted for, and whose bodies that are produced within narratives of suffering, have gradually disappeared over the course of time.

In *Song of the Sun God*, the trope of a mirror is employed to depict how Dhara's narrative is also framed in the history of her family, scars that she has inherited, from witnessing the sexual violation of her mother. The violence to which Dhara is subject is initially presented through the "shard of a broken mirror", which reflects the searing memory of her mother's trauma (145). When the soldiers demand that she remove her clothes, Dhara, lying on the floor with her hands pressed against her legs, recalls the tormenting memory of her mother being approached with a similar force: "scattered around her were fragments of thoughts and memories. There was one, shaped like the shard of a broken mirror that reflected a moment from decades ago. Its edges were sharp, and recollection lacerated her anew."

When Dhara's mother Vani "finally gave her the explanation she'd been waiting for" as to why Nala and Ranjan brought Dhara up as a child, "it wasn't needed anymore" (154). Dhara's trauma, no different from that of her mother's, fuels her own decision to follow the same course of action taken by her mother and hand over her own daughter Smrithi to someone else, in her case to Priya who had migrated to Australia. This drastic decision to distance herself from her daughter is triggered primarily by the crippling fear that the scars she bears, both physical and emotional, from her own trauma and that which she has inherited from her mother, would inevitably be passed down to Smrithi. In her analysis of Sorayya Khan's *Noor*, Ranasinha explores how through her artwork Noor coaxes her family members to explore their repressed individual and collective memories of the 1971 secession, thereby unraveling a "legacy of violence and its psychological impact on individuals, families and communities" (102-105). The fear that haunts generations of Sri Lankan Tamil women that the "legacy of violence" to which their families and communities lay claim will be transmitted to future generations, contributes to a growing body of inherited silences, self-regulated and self-imposed, that hint at the general repression of individual narratives of war-torn Sri Lanka. Yalini in *Love Marriage* notes a similar pattern among the women in her family: "my mother will not show fear, because then it counts; she will not betray anger, knowing how it could come back to hurt her later; she will put your needs before hers without ever letting you know she has done this, because her mother did this, and her mother before her, and her mother before that" (Ganeshananthan 29). In many ways, the fear that their children will be victims of the violence that they underwent as Sri Lankan Tamil women and inherit the emotional scars that preceding generations bear, manifests in the form of a tangible void which Dhara, and later Smrithi, encounter as children in *Song of the Sun God*.

The complexities of these processes of transmission are amplified in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic contexts in which children, though perhaps aware of the bitter experiences of their parents' families and communities, are not provided adequate insight into those individual, communal and national catastrophes. The scars, for instance, that appear on Savitha's body, are couched in the silence of her family regarding the death of her father and their past in Sri Lanka. Savitha is a third-generation Sri Lankan Tamil American diasporic woman, whose story is captured in the narrative titled "Wood and Flesh" in Mohanraj's 2005 *Bodies in Motion*. The narrative cites instances when Savitha craned to hear hushed references that were made to her deceased father, amid conversations that her relations shared regarding war-torn Sri Lanka. She was bemused by how they were "obsessed with history", "a land which Savitha had never seen" and from which her relations were geographically distanced (257). On the second night of her

marriage, Savitha's husband, Thayalan, woke up to find his wife bleeding. As Savitha explains, the "long history of sores, of wounds opening on her body, slowly healing, only to open again" was accompanied by "mysteries in her family, secrets that were unspoken" (255).

Walker dwells on the "embodied silence" encountered in a context of war, and the concerns that arise in approaching the "subject of living bodies that exist, yet are denied" (2013, 81). Walker makes this observation through an incident where she witnesses the mutilated body of a woman that is brought to hospital.[x] However, when she makes inquiries the following day, she is informed that no record of such a person exists, resulting in the "denial of a woman's body" (80-81). Daniel dwells on those "whose participation in the ongoing process of being human has been stifled by the threat of silence, by semeiosic paralysis and by the inescapable presence of violence" (123). While semiosis is related to the activity of signs, anthroposemiosis refers to the awareness of human beings of the relation of signification which as Daniel elucidates, "defines what it is to be human" (121). Daniel reiterates that the "semiotic paralysis" of victims (123) inadvertently impacts the anthroposemiosis, the reason "why silence, especially silence that resists its incorporation into semeiosis, is so fundamentally threatening to humanity" (121). However, Walker also notes that the visceral experience of war and the "embodied silence" of many of its victims is transformed into a powerful means of expression for those unable to articulate the magnitude of their experiences (80). Walker describes the lack of response on the part of one of the participants of her study who had initially agreed to share stories of his experience of detainment by the armed forces during the 1990s. She comments that while he sat in "awkward silence", "he revealed a series of deep scars burrowed into the skin of his ankles and wrists". Walker observes that his scarred body spoke volumes, as "in our frozen exchange, therefore, his body told me far more than any words or even silence could."

Interestingly, through their physical and emotional scars, the women in the respective novels of the study confront the invisibility attributed to their sullied bodies and the silencing of narratives of Sri Lankan Tamil women. In doing so, they not only embody histories of violence but also utilize their scarred bodies as sites of empowerment for their families and communities. In *Song of the Sun God*, Dhara's body, which is scarred beyond repair as it is no longer considered pure, transforms into a space of healing. Listening to stories of forced recruitment in the face of their grieving mothers, including Niri's, a boy she meets on the battlefield during the time she provides medical assistance to war victims, Dhara hugs his body, which she imagines is "covered in the bas-relief of battles past" as he "carried almost as many scars as her now" and "he was only nineteen" (263). Through her commitment to the wounded of her community, Dhara's mutilated, scarred body refuses to be concealed in narratives of violence but is present and visible as a space of healing and restoration.

The scars that Yalini in *Love Marriage* bears are manifestations of the stories of Sri Lankan Tamil women, narrated through the investigative diasporic lens with which Yalini attempts to unearth the individual and collective histories of her family and community. Through the scars she inflicts on her own body, Yalini embodies women whose emotional and physical scars have been considered of little importance and whose narratives remain unacknowledged. She notes that while she has a similar patch of short hair, "like Harini's bare spot", the difference is that unlike Harini's, Yalini's is self-inflicted (265). Yalini notes how her father felt when he first held her as a baby, "I could have been any and all of them, and I was: Uma, Harini, Mayuri, Tharshi. I could have been Vani" (231). The scars that Yalini
inflicts on her body represent histories of pain: "in sleep or daydreams I scratched at my

imperfections until I bled. Sometimes I woke to find sheets smeared with red. I scarred easily and so I bore the scars of my fear" (265). Yalini then chooses to belong to the family and community of the women she embodies, women whose narratives have disappeared over the course of time: "this was not Uma's darkness. It was a different darkness, because it was a darkness that could be stopped" (266). Eventually, Yalini notes that the "face in the mirror mocks its earlier innocence" as she has chosen to belong to "Uma's underworld": "I have placed myself into a sphere in which I did not belong" (277).

In Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion*, Savitha, at the age of nine, carves images, including a floral design around her sores, in response to the excruciating pain that racks her body (252). These images later correlate with her husband's endeavors at carving shapes of small animals, flowers, and fish on wood. Thayalan was attracted to the "long history of the art, the sense that men had whittled forever, since knives were first made sharp enough to cut through wood, coaxing beauty out with clever hands" (253). These engravings are also associated with the Sri Lankan carvings on their bed, which Savitha's mother received as an heirloom from her mother. Savitha's story, as inferred in the title "wood and flesh", captures the harmonious blend of scars on bodies, engravings on wood, and the roots of their Sri Lankan history. Despite her fears that a visit to Sri Lanka may reignite the wounds of her past that are shrouded in secrecy and "bring sores back to the surface", she also learns that in Sri Lanka "even in the middle of a war, children were being born there, life was going on" (263). Therefore, her desire to visit Sri Lanka, despite her previous misgivings, reflects how Savitha's scarred body becomes a space of regeneration, one that represents the resilience of her community in Sri Lanka, as she contemplates, "sometimes, the blood on the sheets was only from the bridal night. Sometimes, there was celebration, there was pleasure, there was joy."

Conclusion

Subsequently, the scarred bodies of women confront the victim narrative into which they are often cast based on war, caste, and culture among the Sri Lankan Tamil community (Rajasingham-Senanayake 139-141). Instead, the scarred bodies of Savitha, Yalini, and Dhara coalesce with the collective tragedies of their communities in Sri Lanka, like Nala's body, which "was a patchwork of skin grafts: pieces borrowed from her thighs and buttocks to replace the pieces that would not re-grow" (Chandran 229) or "like tapestry" when Dhara attempts to stitch Niri's wounds to save his life (266). As Walker notes of the participant of her study, "weaving stories together, Meena revealed a rich tapestry of daily life, which reflected not only her own but many other women's lives in the east" (98).

The multifarious representations of scarred bodies also construct a continuous dialogue between Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic women writers whose portrayals cut across the divide between Sri Lanka and the diaspora. As demonstrated in the analysis, the bodies of Sri Lankan Tamil women represent the aftermath of violence, in terms of the physical and intangible scars of their communities that are unacknowledged, shrouded in secrecy, and transmitted from one generation to the next. Through narrating the stories of these scarred bodies that are considered unworthy of representation, the writers do not merely portray the capacity of these bodies to represent the unhealed wounds of their families and communities, but also confront taboos associated with women's bodies. The representations of embodied histories of violence by Sri

Lankan Tamil diasporic women writers thus extends to contributing to a broader understanding of the scarred bodies of women and their significance in post-war discourses on reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, this study reveals that Sri Lankan Tamil women, considered impure and insignificant and thereby made invisible in patriarchal discourses, utilize their scarred bodies as spaces of empowerment for their families and communities. This is reflected in one of the rare moments in which Nala in *Song of the Sun God* defiantly exposes her scars upon arriving at the Holsworthy Barracks Hospital in which her husband serves as a doctor: "at Holsworthy, she stopped pulling her sari shawl tightly around her neck. She let it drop over her left shoulder as it was supposed to, modestly hiding her chest but naturally showing her neckline. It was liberating: scars didn't matter here-they were almost a badge of honour" (230).

Notes

I. While it has been noted that the vast majority of those who migrated from Sri Lanka were primarily from the Jaffna peninsula (Gerharz; Thiranagama, 2011; Thiranagama 2014), Sriskandarajah maintains that Tamils heralding from the north-eastern part of Sri Lanka that have formed distinct communities both within and outside the country, are popularly identified as "Sri Lankan Tamils" (493). Accordingly, the present study, while acknowledging the heterogeneity and complexity of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, refers to the members of the Tamil community from Sri Lanka represented in the novels as Sri Lankan Tamils. Commenting on the diversity within the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, Daniel, for instance, highlights that the disparate groups of Tamils living in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar and Vavuniya, are treated as culturally inferior to "Jaffna Tamils". Daniel maintains that "Estate Tamils" are generations of those whose ancestors hailed from South India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and traveled to Sri Lanka for labor in coffee and later tea plantations. Daniel adds that Estate Tamils are distinctly identified by their dialect of Tamil, which once again is considered inferior to that spoken by Jaffna Tamils, though in terms of population there have been times they exceeded the number of Jaffna Tamils living in Sri Lanka. However, deportation and voluntary migration resulted in the reduction of their numbers. Daniel also marks the presence of Tamil-speaking Muslims since the 1950s (17-21).

II. The LTTE was labeled as one of the most powerful terrorist forces and was listed as a terrorist group by several countries all over the world, including the United States (US), India, and the United Kingdom (UK). The LTTE was the military reawakening of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) group in 1976. It was founded under the leadership of Uma Maheswaran and the military command of Velupillai Prabhakaran in order to form a separate state within Sri Lanka also known as Tamil Eelam.

III. See Jayasuriya, M. "Terror, trauma, transitions: Representing violence in Sri Lankan literature." *Indialogs*, vol. 3, 2016, pp. 195-209. http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/indialogs.48

IV. Wickramasinghe explores the processes involved in endorsing authenticity in relation to purity, in different facets of life during the religious-cultural stream of nationalism in the early twentieth century in Sri Lanka (97).

V. Short stories in Urdu and Bengali by Rajinder Singh Bedi and Ramapada Chaudhuri on the plight of women victims of the Partition.
VI. Bradley and Kirmani base their analysis on the case of "Nirbhaya"—the gang rape and murder of an Indian woman in 2012 that generated national and international interest.
VII. Maunaguru highlights that rape is also justified as a means of relieving the stress that men undergo in the war zone. Accordingly, Maunuguru records an incident where, following October 1987, allegations regarding multiple rape cases by Indian soldiers were met with the casual assertion that it was a regular practice that was part of any war (168).
VIII. Samuelson makes this claim based on an analysis of the representation of women in the South African war zone in Zoe Wicomb's novel *David's Story.*
IX. Kunju was caught in a fire that scarred her irreparably, denying her of any future prospects of marriage and instead, confining her to the home (Ganeshananthan 71); Harini conceals the scars inflicted on her by her husband (111-118); Mayuri's emotional scars are borne from being a spinster who is then exploited by a colleague, Shanthi, who takes control of Mayuri's life including her finances (195-204).
X. Walker states that according to resources, the woman had been beaten by the faction belonging to Karuna Amman, the TMVP (Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal), that defected from the LTTE.

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